

[Local Railroad Character]

Folklore

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

Washington

J. J. Stauter

Seattle, Washington

December 20, 1938

"Local Railroad Character"

1. Wished to remain anonymous

2. December 19, 1938

3. Seattle waterfront

4. None

5. None

6. None Folklore FORM B Personal History of Informant

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Library of Congress

December 20, 1938

"Local Railroad Character"

Anonymous - Legendary character

1.

2.

3.

etc. (Not available)

A local railroad character, now legendary:

"Did you see old Mr. Lord, that was an N.P. freight checker for so many, years? I guess that was before your time. Old Lord was the perfect checker. He was a tall man, over six feet, slim but with broad shoulders. He got his first job as a freight checker with the N.P. somewhere back in the early eighties, and he just sort of settled down that first day to make it his life work. He seemed to figure that the best way to enjoy life was to be the best checker on the road, nothing more and nothing less. The others could go after promotions for all they were worth. They could beef about the thousands of regulations that they had to follow. They could slip away while a car was being loaded for a cup of coffee or a glass of beer. They could blow about the jobs they once held, or was going to get pretty soon. They could buy automobiles on the installment plan. But not Lord.

"Lord was just a checker. Company regulations never bothered him in the least; as a matter of fact, he had thousands of private regulations of his own that he followed along with the printed ones. It would take the company fifty years to even think up all the rules he set for himself, let alone get them approved by the proper authorities and posted up. That

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was one way to get perfect peace of mind in spite of the Company — to beat them at their own game.

“He never got married, or even, as far as anybody knows, stepped out with a woman. That would take attention off his work — get him to thinking about other things besides tallying freight into cars.— and he was a checker. He lived in a plain little three room house which he had bought with his first year's savings. They say that one of his three rooms was completely filled with copies of his tally sheets — he kept every one since the first day he worked. 2 “His clothes were plain and neat and seemed to date back to the year he started work, like everything else about him; and yet they never looked old or threadbare. He always wore a flowing black tie done in a perfect bow, with the ends hanging down about a foot, like girls used to wear with a “middy blouse.” His face never wrinkled, even when he was over seventy; I guess it was because he had nothing to worry about.

“When it came retirement age, he faced it without any emotion; didn't seem to be either sorry or glad, nor to have any plans as to what to do with his new leisure. Like so many other railroad men, he only lasted a few months after his retirement. The regulations said he couldn't be a checker any more, and—well, he couldn't be anything else, so that was that.”